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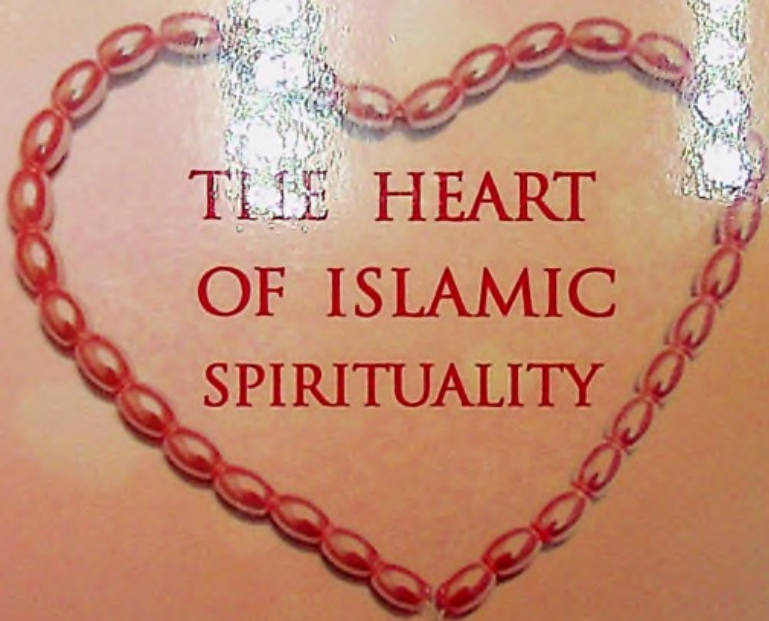

THE HEART OF ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY

MAHNAZ HEYDARPOUR

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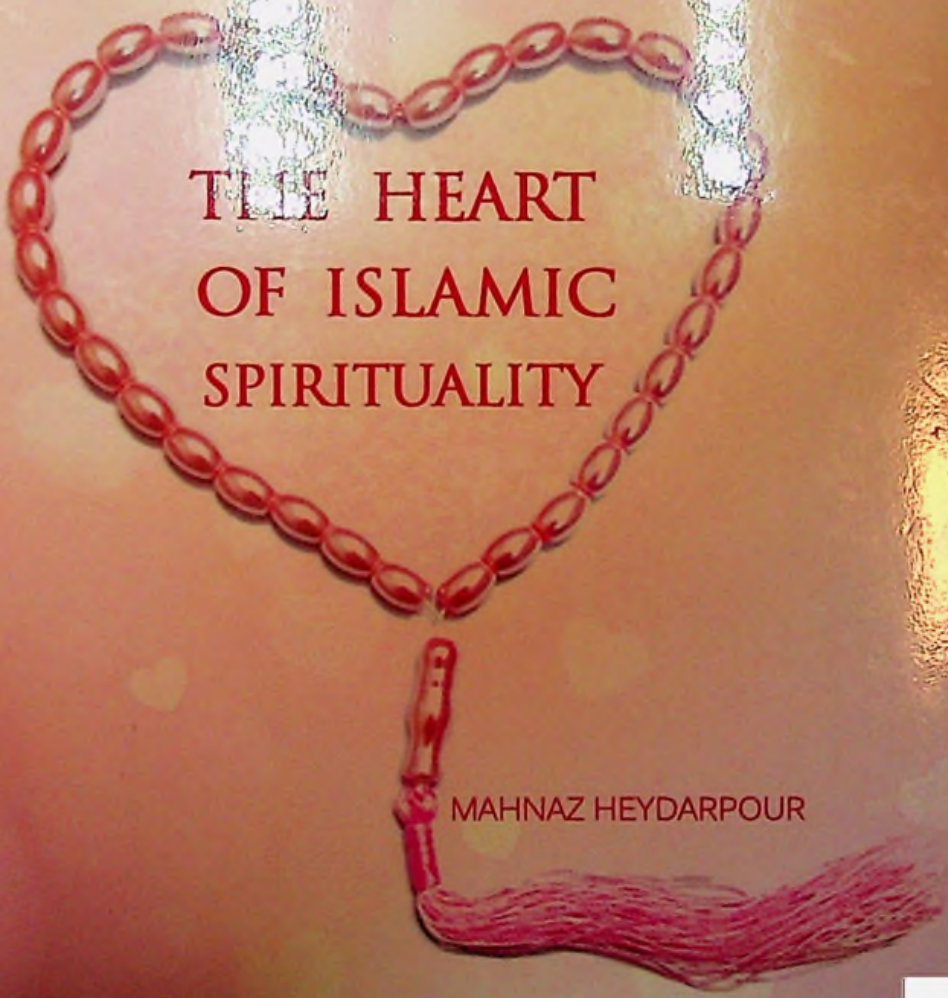

THE HEART OF ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY

MAHNAZ HEYDARPOUR

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The Heart of

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The Heart of Islamic Spirituality

Mahnaz Heydarpour

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Introduction

I am sure you have a beautiful reason for picking up this book. Maybe you are passionate about spirituality and want to read more. Maybe you love God and are interested to know what a book about love and spirituality has to say. Either way, I am happy you are here, and before we start, I want to tell you why I wrote this book.

Love has always been an important part of my life. God first introduced me to love through one of His agents, my mother. I am a mother myself and have no doubt that all mothers love their children. But some mothers are different. Their love is unbelievable, and my mother is one of them. She has the biggest heart and the most loving soul. From the very beginning of my life, I was blessed to taste the sweetness and pleasure of a selfless love.

ittle did I know that I was going to experience a whole new vel of love in few years. When I was only 16 years old, I had breath-taking experience. I felt a flame of God's love in my rt. I had tasted love before from my family and especially mother, but this was different. This love was whelming. In no time, it took over my whole existence.

It is difficult to articulate even now. But back then it was harder for me to understand what this experience was.

For that reason, I spoke with a spiritual guide about my experience who then told me about the "path of love" and told me "if you want to have a permanent presence of love for God in your heart, open your heart and love all His people". And that is how it all began for me.

This experience gave a new spirit to my life. I was so overwhelmed by knowing God and getting close to Him that I felt that I would no longer be able to continue my ordinary life. Despite all the plans that my parents and I had previously made for me, I decided to start a completely new life. I devoted my life to deepening my knowledge of Islam and, more importantly, to drawing closer to God. Although I feel I could have done more on this path, I am sure that I chose the best path for my life, the path of love.

Years after that, I got married to an amazing man, and as fate had it, we moved to England. During our time in England, by the plan of God we encountered the Focolare movement. It was an incredible experience. Knowing people in another part of the world, from another tradition, who are talking and practicing the same thing: love for God and for one anoth- Now I had found others who believed in and fo" same way, the path of love.

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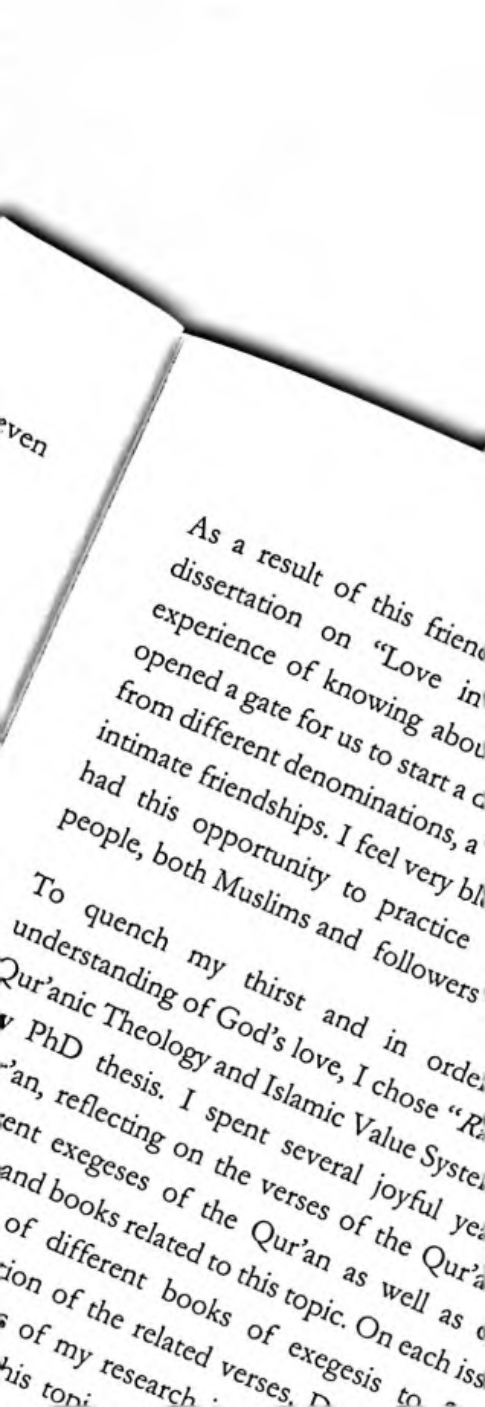

What I found as result of my research was amazing and added to my understanding of God's love and intensified my yearning for getting closer to Him. Throughout my life, this understanding of God who is love and caring has given meaning to my life; it has given me hope, courage, and peace during the most difficult times of my life.

Thus, I decided to share the results of my research and personal experiences with others. I hope it can help the readers to connect to God or strengthen their connection if they already have one so that they can taste and enjoy the sweetness of love of God and its outcomes which are peace, tranquillity, and strength during the suffering and hardships of life.

The whole content of this book is based on verses, hadiths, and profound theological and spiritual teachings, but I tried to write it in a simple way so that everyone could relate to the message behind it.

There were many hadiths and verses to choose from and they were all beautiful and amazing. I still tried to include as many hadiths and verses as I could, but these are only a sample of the many sayings, hadiths, prayers, and verses that exist on this topic.

In my view, it is possible to summarise the core of Islamic spirituality in two points: first to be attentive and mindful of God whole-heartedly while establishing a close relation with

Him based on love; and, second, loving and serving His people.

If everyone practices these two points, it will lead us to a world full of love, happiness, and peace.

At the end I would like to thank my family that supported me in different ways. My respected husband Dr. Shaikh Shomali, despite his busy schedule, took the time to read the book and offer his valuable comments. My older son, Mohammad Reza designed the cover with the help of my daughter, Masoumeh. My daughter in law, Zahraa, read the book and gave her feedback and my younger son, Shaikh Mohammad Javad, encouraged me to write this book. I would also like to thank Dr Amina Inloes for editing this book.

Last but not the least, I thank God who gifted me this understanding and showed me the path of love. I pray to God to bless those teachers who guided me through my journey with their knowledge and wisdom.

Mahnaz Heydarpour

22 November 2018

Embarking on the spiritual journey

There are moments in life that can be turning points for us, if we do not ignore them. These are the times when we feel that we are in need of something greater than all the pleasures of this world, when we feel that whatever the world has to offer still does not satisfy the need in us for something transcendental.

It may happen when we are at the peak of achievement in our worldly lives yet still feel unsatisfied. Instead, we may feel that we are in need of a pleasure beyond worldly pleasures.

Or it may happen after we lose someone whom we loved dearly and depended upon. We may feel lonely, broken, insecure and in need of a permanent source of love to fill the void, something we can rely on to get peace and security.

Or it may happen when we are leading a normal life, nothing special, but read a book or hear a lecture which inspires us to look beyond the appearance of this material world, to look for a purpose and a goal in our lives which is much greater and more valuable than what we are already aware of, something that gives a real and deep meaning to our lives.

No matter what creates this awareness in us, one thing we know for sure is that it happens to every single one of us. If it has not happened yet, it soon will. The Prophet Muhammad (s) has informed us and, in a sense, promised us that in every person's life there will be moments when they sense God's presence and wake up to the realization that there is more to life.[1]

These moments open a window for us to see a reality beyond what we see with our physical eyes, to show that material reality is just a sign to lead us to something deeper. The material world exists to help us understand the purpose of our creation and the goal we should have in life. This is why God asks us not to just see and pass by but to reflect on His creation and wonders of this world:

> وَ اخْتِلافِ اَلَّيْلِ وَ النَّهارِ وَ مَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِن رِّزْقٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَ تَصْرِيفِ الرِّيَاحِ آيَاتٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ
>
> And in the alternation of night and day and what God sends down from the sky of] His [provision with which He revives the earth after its death, and in the changing of the winds

---

[1] Fayḍ Kāshānī, Muhammad Muḥsin, *al-Wāfī*, vol. 1, p, 552. The original text is as follows:

> إن لربكم فى أيام دهركم نفحات ألا فتعرضوا لها
>
> In your time from your Lord there are winds (or breezes, *nafaḥāt*), so benefit from them.

there are signs for a people who apply reason
(Qur'an 45:5)

We are not brought to this world to just enjoy ourselves. If that is how we see the world, if the only purpose in our life is to seek worldly pleasure, then as soon as we are challenged by calamities and suffering, we will feel like we have lost our reason to live; we will lose hope and fall into misery. But the pleasures of this world are not what we are here for. For even at their best, the maximum pleasure in this world is miniscule. The Qur'an says:

قُلْ مَتَاعُ الدُّنْيَا قَلِيلٌ وَالآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لِّمَنِ اتَّقَى

Say, "The enjoyment of this world is little and the Hereafter is better for the God-wary."
(Qur'an 4:77)

Many religiously-minded people already feel that life is more than material pleasures, and that one should patiently endure suffering in order to gain a comfortable and peaceful life in the hereafter. However, there is more to it than that. Many people stop at this point and think that the blessings of heaven are the highest the human being can achieve. But that is not the case. There is a reality even higher and greater than this – a pleasure that we do not have to wait for until after death and the hereafter to enjoy; rather, we can experience it in this world.

The greater pleasure

The following verse of the Qur'an refers to this fact and introduces the greater pleasure:

> وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الأَنْهارُ خالِدِينَ فِيها وَ مَساكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِى جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ
>
> God has promised the believers, male and female, gardens beneath which rivers flow, abiding therein, beauteous places in the Gardens of Eden – and God's pleasure is greater [than all these]. That is the great success! (Qur'an 9:72)

God's pleasure is the maximum achievement that we can attain in our lives. It makes our lives meaningful. It should be our main goal; all other goals should be directed in such a way that they help us achieve this main one.

Some might object that we were first discussing a greater pleasure for human beings, but now the discussion has switched to God's pleasure. So, let me clarify. First, God is not like a tyrant king who needs our services or whom we must obey out of fear in order to please. Rather He is like a kind, caring, and wise father that guides us towards our growth and happiness. He is pleased when He sees that we are growing and nearing our own happiness. Therefore, when

we see the result of following His instructions, we also will be pleased. Referring to a true servant, God says in the Qur'an:

يَاأَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي

O soul at peace! Return to your Lord, pleased, pleasing. Then enter among My servants and enter My paradise! (Qur'an 89:27-30)

As we see in this verse when we try to please God, in addition to being pleased, we will attain a heart full of peace and tranquillity.

In truth, this is a journey on the path of peace:

يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ

With it [the Qur'an], God guides those who follow [the way of] His pleasure to the ways of peace, and brings them out from darkness into light by His will, and guides them to a straight path. (Qur'an 5:16)

This is because this journey is towards God who is the source of peace:

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ

God is He, other than Whom there is no other god: the Sovereign, the Holy, the source of Peace. (Qur'an 59:23)

A beautiful point here is that all this pleasure and peace is achievable when we establish a close relationship with God. As soon as this relationship starts, peace and joy enter our hearts, and the stronger this relationship becomes, the more we will experience this joy and peace.

This joy and peace initiated by the close relationship to God are what I referred to as something more enjoyable than all the worldly pleasures. When this connection is there, then no suffering can make us hopeless or desperate. Then even during the most difficult calamities, we will have peace in our hearts. Indeed, in any challenge that we face, no matter how great, what makes us suffer the most is losing our peace and tranquillity. The best example is what Lady Zainab (a) said after she lost many of her loved ones, including Imam Husain (a), in one day and then was taken captive along with Imam Sajjad (a) and the remaining women and children. She experienced immense pain and suffering but said "I saw nothing except beauty,"[1] for she could see beyond the scene of Karbala; she could see the reality of the world and had a deep connection with God.

The first stage of the journey: the point of departure

Coming to know this fact means that we are at the departure point for our spiritual journey towards God. Of course, this does not mean that those who have not started this journey

---

[1] Ibn Namā al-Hillī, Ja'far b. Muhammad, *Muthīr al-Aḥzān*, p. 90.

do not believe in God. There may be many believers in God who are committed to performing acts of worship as a matter of habit, but have not yet experienced and are not aware of the pleasure of having a close relationship with God. That is why mystics call this stage of the journey "wakefulness" (*yaqẓah*). As the Prophet (s) said, some people are asleep all their lives and only wake up when they die.[1]

Thus, the departure point is this awareness and wakefulness, and the destination is closeness to God and filling the heart with His presence.

Of course, when we talk about getting close to God it does not mean that He is not already close to us. He is nearer to us than our jugular vein:

وَ نحنُ أقْرَبُ إلَيْه منْ حَبْلِ الْوَريد

And We are nearer to him than his jugular vein. (Qur'an 50:16)

We also read in the Qur'an:

وَ اعْلَمُواْ أنَّ اللّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَ قَلْبِه

Know that God intervenes between a person and his heart. (Qur'an 8:24)

---

[1] Warrām Ibn Abī Farās, *Majmū'ah Warrām*, vol. 1, p. 150. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

النّاس نيام حتّى إذا ماتوا إنتبهوا

People are asleep; when they die, they become alert.

He is with us wherever we are:

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ

> He is with you wherever you may be. (Qur'an 57:4)

God is close to us, but we are the ones that should elevate ourselves and seek nearness to Him. Also, as is obvious, we do not mean physical nearness but rather spiritual and existential nearness, because God is not limited to any place or space. In physical nearness, both parties are either near each other or far from each other, but in intellectual or spiritual relations, it is possible for one party to be close to the other but not vice versa, like a teacher who might be very close his students but whose students might be away from him, and this is why he understands them but not the other way around necessarily.

The second stage of the journey: self-knowledge

When we become aware that there is more to this world and we want to experience that, it becomes time for the next step of our spiritual journey, self-knowledge. We should try to understand ourselves and discover our potential and our capacity for perfection. In a divine (*qudsī*)[1] hadith, God says:

---

[1] *Qudsī* hadiths are those which relate the word of God given to prophets through means other than scriptures.

لايَسعُنى أرْضى وَ لاسَمَائى وَ لَكِنْ يَسعُنى قَلْبُ عَبْدِىَ الْمُؤْمِن

Neither my heaven nor my earth could contain Me, but it is the heart of My believing servant that can contain Me.[1]

What a delight it is that our heart can be a place for the presence of God! All creatures are important, but human beings have been given special status. God says:

وَ لَقَدْ كَرَّمْنا بَنى آدَمَ وَ حَمَلْناهُمْ فِى الْبَرِّ وَ الْبَحْرِ وَ رَزَقْناهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّباتِ وَ فَضَّلْناهُمْ عَلى كَثيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنا تَفْضيلاً

Certainly, we have honoured the Children of Adam, and carried them over land and sea, and provided them with all the good things, and given them an advantage over many of those We have created with a complete preference. (Qur'an 17:70)

This is the opportunity which we have been given. It is up to us to choose the worldly pleasure, which is little, or else to choose blessings in the Hereafter which are better[2] – or the best and greatest blessing which is proximity to God, the Giver of all blessings, and encountering our Lord, the Creator of the universe.

---

[1] Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Muhammad, *Awālī al-La'ālī al-'Azīzīyyah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Dīnīyyah*, vol. 4, p. 7.

[2] Say, "The enjoyment of this world is little and the Hereafter is better for the God-wary." (Qur'an 4:77)

The third stage of the journey: self-care

The next step after self-knowledge is self-care. Now that we know to what extent we can grow existentially and spirituality, we must take care of ourselves. The following things must be considered in this stage.

Appropriate beliefs

First, we should examine our main beliefs. Is what we believe only dogma on our tongue which we have memorized from childhood, or do we really understand our beliefs; can we rationally argue for them? That is still not enough; our beliefs should settle in our hearts and be applied in our daily lives.

For example, if we say we believe in the unity of God (*tawḥīd*), we should know that for being a true monotheist (*muwaḥḥid*), it is not enough to be able to prove the unity of God with rational arguments. Rather, it is necessary to understand it deeply in our hearts and let it direct our lives, actions and emotions. We need to know how it can affect our daily lives.

Performing acts of piety and refraining from wrong deeds

Sincerity is also very important on this journey. We cannot say we want to grow spiritually and move closer to God while our actions contradict our claim. Therefore, we should avoid any wrong or forbidden deeds and commit ourselves to good ones, including rituals, acts of worship and moral behaviours. In addition, a good intention can change ordinary actions to

spiritual ones. For example, if we eat to get energy and sleep with the intention of refreshing ourselves so that we can serve people, then even our eating and sleeping themselves will be turned into good deeds. Or even sometimes in conversation by being silent and letting the other party speak more so that they feel good, we are turning our silence into a good deed. A beautiful hadith says:

طُوبَى لِمَنْ أَخْلَصَ لِلَّهِ عَمَلَهُ وَعِلْمَهُ وَ حُبَّهُ وَ بُغْضَهُ وَ أَخْذَهُ وَ تَرْكَهُ وَ كَلَامَهُ وَ صَمْتَهُ

Blessed be those who purify [for the sake of God] their action, knowledge, love, dislike, taking, leaving aside, speech and silence.[1]

When we try to do everything for the sake of God, then automatically wrong actions will be avoided. In this way, each moment of our life, whether we are awake or sleeping, whether we are talking or silent, we will be moving forward.

In fact, if we are firm in our beliefs, we will do good actions very easily and there would be no need to force ourselves into doing them specially with respect to dos and don'ts. If we understand God's attributes – like, for example, the One, all Wise, all-Knowing, Loving, Benevolent, and Rich wholeheartedly, then we will realise that the One who has created us has complete knowledge about us and knows the

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[1] Ibn Shu'bah Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan, *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, p. 91.

best way for us to live well in this world and how to go towards our happiness. Therefore, out of His love and benevolence, He has given us some instructions.

Purifying and decorating the heart

The third requirement of this stage is removing bad qualities from our hearts and acquiring good ones. The heart will become a place for the presence of God, so it is necessary to clean and decorate it. A sound heart (*qalb-i salīm*) is the most important part of success on the spiritual journey. The Qur'an says:

> يَوْمَ لاَيَنفَعُ مَالٌ وَ لاَبَنُونَ إِلا مَنْ أَتىَ اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ
>
> The day when neither wealth nor children will avail, except him who comes to God with a sound heart. (Qur'an 26:88-89)

When a heart is completely cleaned and purified, it is a heart empty of grudges, hatred, jealousy, or anything that does not have a divine fragrance. This way we will have a heart ready to host the divine. Commenting on this verse, a hadith says:

> اَلْقَلْبُ السَّلِيمُ اَلَّذِى يَلْقَى رَبَّهُ وَ لَيْسَ فِيهِ أَحَدٌ سِوَاه
>
> The pure heart is the one that meets its Lord while it is free from anyone else.[1]

---

[1] Kulaynī Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 16.

All of us human beings will encounter God, the Lord of the universe, after the transition to the other world, but it is possible for a purified heart to meet Him even in this world. Once Imam Ali (a) was asked: "Have you seen your Lord that you worship?" He replied: "I do not worship a Lord that I do not see." Then the Imam (a) added: "Beware, the eyes do not see Him by way of sight, but rather, the hearts see Him through the realities of faith."[1]

We can be among those people who see God with the vision of their heart in different conditions of life, during the day and night.[2]

---

[1] Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī,* vol. 1, p. 98. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) قَالَ: جَاءَ حِبْرٌ إِلَى أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ صَلَوَاتُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ فَقَالَ: يَا أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ هَلْ رَأَيْتَ رَبَّكَ حِينَ عَبَدْتَهُ. قَالَ: فَقَالَ: وَيْلَكَ مَا كُنْتُ أَعْبُدُ رَبّاً لَمْ أَرَهُ. قَالَ: وَ كَيْفَ رَأَيْتَهُ؟ قَالَ: وَيْلَكَ لاتُدْرِكُهُ الْعُيُونُ فِي مُشَاهَدَةِ الأَبْصَارِ وَ لَكِنْ رَأَتْهُ الْقُلُوبُ بِحَقَائِقِ الإِيمَانِ.

[2] Fayḍ Kāshānī, Muhammad, *al-Maḥajjah al-Bayḍā' fī Tahdhīb al-Aḥyā',* vol. 8, p. 35. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

التحقيق أنّه لا فرق في الرؤية بين الدّنيا و الآخرة فكما أنّه لا يجوز رؤيته سبحانه في الدّنيا بالعين و البصر فكذلك لا يجوز رؤيته في الآخرة بالعين و البصر، و كما أنّه يجوز رؤيته في الآخرة بالقلب و البصيرة لأهل البصائر أعني غاية الانكشاف و الوضوح بحيث يتأدّى إلى المشاهدة و اللّقاء كذلك يجوز رؤيته في الدّنيا بهذا المعنى و الحجاب بينه و بين خلقه ليس إلا الجهل و قلّة المعرفة دون البدن، فإنّ أولياء اللّه يشاهدونه في الدّنيا في جميع أحوالهم و متصرّفاتهم ليلهم و نهارهم.

Characteristics of the spiritual journey

Now that we have a general account of the departure point and later steps – namely, self-knowledge and self-care – I will now discuss some other characteristics of this spiritual journey.

What we need

Guidance. To find and remain on the right path, we need guidance. The intellect, the *fiṭrah*,[1] prophets, and divine books are general guidance available for everyone, but if we are appreciative and put forth our utmost effort, we will be provided with special guidance. Several verses of the Qur'an refer to this special guidance. For example, we read in the Qur'an:

> فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ بِاللَّهِ وَ اعْتَصَمُواْ بِهِ فَسَيُدْخِلُهُمْ فِي رَحْمَةٍ مِّنْهُ وَ فَضْلٍ وَ يَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَيْهِ صِرَاطًا مُّسْتَقِيمًا
>
> As for those who have faith in God, and hold fast to Him, He will admit them to His mercy and grace, and He will guide them on a straight path to Him. (Qur'an 4:174)

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[1] *Fiṭrah* refers to the distinctive spiritual capacity embedded by God in human creation that sets human beings apart from other animals and inclines them to seek perfection and virtue. All human beings possess this common human element, and so they are all predisposed to strive for perfection and truth. Shomali, Muhammad Ali, *Islamic Belief System*, p. 18.

Receiving this special guidance is guaranteed. If we are sincere and do our best on His way then surely, God will guide us further:

وَالَّذِينَ جاهَدُوا فينا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنا

As for those who strive in Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways. (Qur'an 29:69)

Provisions. Like any journey in this world, this spiritual journey also requires prvisions. For an ordinary journey, depending on the distance of the destination and number of days we want to spend traveling and staying at each stop or at the destination, we need money to buy things such as tickets, fuel, and food. On this spiritual journey, the provision is our sincere good deeds.

Persistence. As I will explain later, the journey before us is very long and there are many challenges on the way, but the goal is priceless. We need to be persistent and consistent. The Qur'an says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقامُوا فَلا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَ لا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

Indeed, those who say, "Our Lord is God," and then remain steadfast will have no fear, nor will they grieve. (Qur'an 46:13)

Also a prayer reads:

قَدْ عَلِمْتُ أَنَّ أَفْضَلَ زَادِ الرَّاحِلِ إِلَيْكَ عَزْمُ إِرَادَةٍ يَخْتَارُكَ بِهَا

I know for sure that the best provision for the one who intends to travel to You is true and strong willpower by which he chooses You.[1]

Therefore, we should not let anything disturb us, nor should we let any failure disappoint us.

The stations

There are many stations on the way to the destination. We may not reach the last station, but this does not mean that we have not achieved anything. What matters the most is that we do our best. As long as we are on the way, we will enjoy the trip, and it will be appreciated. In a *qudsī* hadith God says:

بِعَيْنِي مَا يَتَحَمَّلُونَ مِنْ أَجْلِي وَ بِسَمْعِي مَا يَشْكُونَ مِنْ حُبِّي

It is not hidden from my sight what they endure for My sake and I hear the complain they make out of My love.[2]

According to a beautiful story, one day an ant picked up a large grain and walked in the wilderness. The ant was asked, "Where are you going?" He replied, "I want to take this grain

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[1] Ibn Ṭāwūs, Ali b. Mūsā, *al-Iqbāl bi al-A'māl al-Ḥasanah*, vol. 3, p. 277, supplication of month of Rajab by Imam Kaẓim (a).

[2] Shahīd Thānī, Zayn al-Dīn b. Ali, *Musakkin al-Fu'ād*, p. 19.

to my beloved friend who is in another city." He was told, "It seems impossible for you to go all that way and cross the mountains to see him." The ant said, "It does not matter. As long as I am on this path, he understands that I love him."

Destination and duration

Our aim is to reach or meet God. God is perfect, absolute, and infinite and this means that the distance of this journey is infinite. On the other hand, the time that we have is our lifetime which is very limited, even if we live long. However, the reality is that we cannot even be certain of the next day or the one after. Considering the infinity of the distance and limitation of the time, we may think that it is impossible to achieve success on this journey.

This difficulty is something we have all experienced. We feel like no matter how hard we try we are still far from where we should be. We feel like there is still so much left of the journey to get close to God. But we have to remember this journey has been planned by a just and wise God. So what is the secret? Why would a just God plan a journey that seems so be impossible to undertake? Well, there is a secret. The answer is love. Love is what makes this impossible journey possible – not just that, but also short and the sweetest experience that we can have in life.

Love is the fast track

When we sincerely embark on the journey towards God and make efforts, God will help us in different ways.

يَا مَنْ إِذَا أَقْبَلَ عَلَيْهِ عَبْدٌ قَرَّبَهُ وَ أَدْنَاه

O He who when a servant approaches Him brings him near and close.[1]

However, for this long journey there is a fast track line which gives us so much energy that we become tireless and at the same time makes the journey full of joy and pleasure. And that is the path of love.

ما أَطْيَبَ طَعْمَ حُبِّكَ، وَما أَعْذَبَ شرْبَ قُرْبِكَ

How pleasant is the taste of your love, and how delightful is the drink of your nearness![2]

When we love someone deeply, it empowers us to do everything that makes our beloved happy, and we do it out of joy.

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[1] Majlisī, Muhammad Bāqir, *Zād al-Ma'ād,* 'The Whispered Prayer of the Hopeful' (*Munājāt al-Rājīn*) by Imam Sajjād (a), p. 408.

[2] Ibid., 'The Whispered Prayer of the Knowers' *(Munajāt al-'Arifīn*) by Imam Sajjād (a), p. 415.